

Turning houses into homes: living through urban regeneration in East Manchester

Abstract:

Repeated studies of urban regeneration have focused on the displacement of working class residents, but those who remain living in sites of urban change have received less attention. To attend to this gap, this paper focuses on the lives of long-standing residents in East Manchester, a site of urban regeneration, and examines their views of urban change. Ethnographic research reveals how the demolition and rebuilding of new houses has resulted in a deep sense of uncertainty. Drawing on anthropological theories of materiality, the analysis makes an original contribution to debates about urban regeneration, showing how social and material relations have been reconfigured and arguing that this in turn has created new meanings about the home.

Introduction

This paper draws on an ethnographic research of post-industrial life in East Manchester, a site of urban regeneration. It examines the consequences of urban change for residents, who have remained living in a site of intensive urban change, ten years after the New Deal for Communities was launched. Despite millions of pounds of investment and radical physical transformation, many long-standing residents felt as though these localities remain dislocated from the rest of the city and characterised by an overwhelming sense of uncertainty about the future. In this context, rumours and confusion about the future prevailed, particularly, in relation to housing. Local people questioned whether or not their community could ever be regenerated as large numbers of existing homes had already been demolished disrupting social ties, in ways that people felt were inherently unpredictable. Drawing on anthropological theories of materiality, the analysis makes an original contribution to debates about urban regeneration by arguing that attachments to houses and streets have had multiple, and sometimes unintended social consequences.

Critical studies of urban regeneration have drawn attention to its ‘dark side’ (Porter and Shaw, 2009:1), highlighting a range of negative social outcomes for lower-income people. These

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3 include, for example; the displacement of existing residents (Lees et al., 2008; Glucksberg,
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5 2014), social exclusion for those who remain (Watt, 2013), exacerbation of gender
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7 inequalities (Gosling, 2008; McKenzie, 2015), reduction of suitable housing (Slater, 2006)
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9 and feelings of alienation and disempowerment (Wallace, 2015). Following Smith, these
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11 authors claim that 'regeneration' provides 'anodyne' language which 'sugar-coats' processes
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13 of gentrification (2002:445). These studies strongly suggest that inequalities are deepening in
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15 urban areas as working class neighbourhoods are being destroyed by processes of
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17 gentrification, under the guise of regeneration policies.
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21 In response, Porter and Shaw (2009) have argued that while urban regeneration can mean the
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23 same as gentrification, it does not always do so as its impacts are always varied. They suggest
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25 that more nuanced approaches are required, to examine specific regeneration policies at work
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27 in different localities. Similarly, Doucet (2009) suggests that gentrification debates are
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29 narrowly focused on 'winners' and 'losers', but these processes are always more complex
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31 than this narrative suggests. Many people do not fit into either category and, even though
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33 displacement is inherent to the gentrification process, there are some local residents who
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35 remain. There is, therefore, a gap in the literature of studies which examine the views of
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37 residents who remain living in sites of urban change (Doucet, 2009). Also, as Gosling (2008)
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39 outlines, further research is required to understand how urban redevelopment impacts on
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41 women, who are more likely to be affected by regeneration, as they tend to rely on
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43 community facilities and support networks more than men.
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49 Addressing these gaps in the literature, the present paper examines what makes a house a
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51 home in a context of rapid material transformation. It explores the effects of urban
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53 regeneration on housing, from the perspective of female residents who have remained living
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55 in East Manchester, which has been reshaped by numerous waves of urban redevelopment.
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57 Rather than asking whether regeneration is a form of gentrification, this paper explores the
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subjective experiences of those who have remained in a site of rapid change, revealing how the process is more complex than some analyses account for. The ethnography highlights some of the ways in which individuals recreate and renew community and social relationships through their connections to their homes, and the surrounding areas, such as their gardens and streets. My findings suggest that divisions between the public and private domains are often permeable. Examining the ways in which individuals forge connections to their houses, the paper analyses how material belonging is formed, in relation to the transformations in the built environment.

The discussion is structured as follows: First, I explain the ethnographic approach which was taken in the field site, East Manchester. Secondly, I present three ethnographic vignettes which reflect on different issues regarding housing. Thirdly, I discuss these findings in relation to anthropological work on materiality and the home which offer useful theoretical tools for this analysis, drawing attention to the analogous relationship between the material environment and social relations. As Douglas (1991) writes, there is a clear distinction between the conceptions of the house and the home. ‘Having shelter is not having a home, nor is having a house, nor is home the same as a household’ (1991:288). A home, therefore, is not only a space, ‘it also has some structure in time; and because it is for people who are living in that time and space, it has aesthetic and moral dimensions’ (1991:288). Following this approach, the analysis explores the home as the ‘realisation of ideas’ (Douglas, 1991:290). This approach sees the home both a dwelling place and a lived space of interaction between people, places and things (Mallet, 2004). To conclude, the paper suggests that critical approaches to regeneration would benefit from incorporating accounts of the lived experiences of people in localities undergoing change and engages with theoretical approaches to materiality. It argues that understanding shifting meanings of home in the

context of rapid change is vital in order to shed light on the experiences of people who remain living in sites of urban redevelopment.

Ethnographic methodological approach

Community studies in Britain have traced the impacts of urban policies at the local level on working class communities. Detailed ethnographic studies shed light on the effects of slum clearances in the post-Second World War period, stressing the continuation of social ties among urban communities (Young and Willmott, 1957). Today, a growing body of research explores how localities have been drastically reshaped by deindustrialisation and its attendant economic and social changes showing how high levels of displacement have shifted notions of community and identity (Degnen, 2005; Edwards et al., 2012; Evans, 2012; McKenzie, 2015; Paton, 2014). Building on these studies, the present paper explores the themes of community, kinship and social class in East Manchester, a site of deindustrialisation and repeated waves of urban regeneration.

During a twelve month period of fieldwork in 2010, I developed a network of key informants in local sites, including a market, allotments, shops, community centre sessions including a weekly coffee morning, the Sure Start centre, Mothers' Union meetings and, after some time, people's homes. My informants were women, in their fifties to eighties, who socialised with each other regularly. They described themselves as 'working-class', 'Mancunian' and 'local', meaning that they had lived in the area for their entire lives. As an outsider to the area, these women felt that it was important that I should learn about their 'local knowledge'. This was partly because they were concerned that, amid the dramatic transformations which have taken place in the landscape, their history would disappear (see Author 2016).¹

¹ Reference blinded for review process.

As a female researcher, I was welcomed into certain social spaces in East Manchester more than others. There were a number of male-dominated settings, such as the allotments, which were difficult to gain access to. Men were polite but difficult to engage with for longer periods of time. Due to the difficulties of these encounters, most of my attention focused on the more productive relationships I developed with older women in East Manchester. They welcomed me into their social circles and homes, inviting me to participate in aspects of their everyday lives. To gain a deeper understanding of social life in the area, I participated in the local social worlds of these women and here reflect on the outcome of this participation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1989). My aim was to explore everyday sociality which was enacted in these spaces (Watson, 2009) and to understand how they made sense of the changes which had taken place, particularly in relation to housing.

In order to carry out an ethnographic study, I decided to live in Beswick so I could become involved in the day-to-day life of my informants. Living locally enabled me to carry out participant observation work in the regenerated landscape and to gain a perspective of living in a regenerated locality. As I developed trust with my informants I also carried out semi-structured interviews in their homes, to learn more about their life histories and the issues which were important to them. Over the twelve months period of fieldwork, it was possible to pay close attention to the ways in which they engaged in home making and the wider landscape, as it transformed over time. My findings here focus on the issues which were important to my informants and are based on analysis of observations and conversations which took place throughout this period of immersive fieldwork.

The paper presents three ethnographic vignettes which reveal some of the complexities of my informants' experiences in regards to housing. The three informants were all home-owners, but nonetheless felt precarious and uncertain about the future, due to wider regeneration processes. These accounts have been chosen as they illustrate some of the specific issues in

East Manchester. They are not representative of all residents, as the ‘public’ are ‘multiple and differentiated’ and have different demands on spaces giving it a variety of meanings (Massey, 2001:467). My aim therefore is not to make broad sweeping generalisations but to use this selection of ethnographic examples to reveal how social ties have been radically reconfigured due to changes in the built environment. Following Rapport’s (2002) ethnographic approach, I emphasise the importance of representing diversity and the multiplicity of people’s views and show that the social lives that I observed cannot be essentialized or absolutely defined. The meaning of home is shifting, due to the changes which have taken place to housing. The discussion reflects how regeneration was experienced in various and sometimes unexpected ways, relating to material and social change. Before analysing the ethnographic findings, I briefly introduce East Manchester, the site of fieldwork.

East Manchester’s urban regeneration

During the New Labour period (1997-2010) cities were placed at the heart of plans designed to foster a more ‘inclusive, mutually supportive society’ (Mace et al., 2007:52). Consumption based and property-led forms of economic regeneration were seen as a ‘panacea for urban problems’ in localities coming to terms with severe deindustrialisation and the loss of manufacturing employment (Raco, 2003:1869). Under the ‘New Deal for Communities’ a diverse array of political strategies was introduced in order to encourage private developers to invest in run-down and derelict urban areas (Jones and Evans, 2008). In East Manchester urban regeneration was introduced as part of the legacy of the Commonwealth Games in 2002. It promised to ‘guarantee economic, social and environmental sustainability; achieve highest standards of physical redevelopment; retain its existing population; and improve its social and economic prospects’ (Parkinson et al., 2006:3).

In 2000, New East Manchester (NEM hereafter) was established. It was one of three Urban Regeneration Companies created by the government to deliver physical improvements to the built environment through partnership with existing agencies (Parkinson et al., 2006). NEM was awarded £51.7million to address deprivation in Openshaw and Beswick under the Single Regeneration Budget. NEM’s vision was outlined in its original Regeneration Framework in 2000 which identified a number of key aims, including increasing the population of East Manchester by 30,000, building 12,500 new homes and improving 7000 existing properties (Parkinson et al., 2006:4). Housing formed a key element of the regeneration plans, in an attempt to improve the living standards of existing residents and also to encourage new people to move to the area. NEM aimed to enhance living standards and repopulate these neighbourhoods to bridge the gap between the wealth of the city centre and the strong sense of stigma attached to East Manchester. Across the area more widely, NEM delivered a wide range of regeneration programmes including building new transportation infrastructure and green spaces, creating greater access to employment and providing new community resources. A wide variety of new facilities, institutions and commercial sites were built. They include, to name a few: the City of Manchester Stadium, a 38 000 capacity stadium which was built for the 2002 Commonwealth Games and then leased by the council to Manchester City Football Club. Also, an Academy school which opened in 2010 for pupils between the ages of 11-18 and shops such as the Morrison’s supermarket shopping complex in Openshaw and Asda supermarket in Beswick.

Within media accounts and marketing materials, Manchester is celebrated as a success story. The post-industrial conurbation is described as being transformed from, ‘a grimy, northern industrial city’, to a ‘hip, fashionable and dynamic place where people are excited to live’ (Jones and Evans, 2008: 163). The ‘Manchester model’ of regeneration is often cited as an example which other cities should emulate. However, regeneration has been widely criticised

for relying on an entrepreneurial ethos, where the city is regarded as a business (MacLeod and Ward, 2002; Ward, 2003). Urban scholars have drawn critical attention to enduring social inequalities that continue to shape the city (Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Ward 2003; Young, Diep and Drabble, 2006; Wallace 2015). These accounts importantly draw attention to the alienating effects of urban change for working class communities in Manchester.

Complimenting these studies, this ethnography makes an original contribution to the literature by adding detailed research of the day-to-day lives and experiences of change from the perspectives of local people. The discussion explores how changes to the physical environment have impacted on remaining residents' sense of belonging, place and community.

Shifts in housing policy

Critical studies of urban regeneration have stressed that housing policies have resulted in a number of direct and indirect negative consequences for working class people. Many regenerated localities have seen high levels of displacement, due to what Watt (2013) describes as the emergence of a 'state-induced rent gap', where rising house prices force out original residents. Council tenants pay relatively low rents while housing sits on land which has potentially high value. The rent gap of existing land becomes 'unlocked' through Compulsory Purchase Orders. These shifts must be placed amidst wider cuts to neighbourhood services, welfare and benefits, increasing marketization and the public-private partnerships, plus a reduction in social housing (Paton, 2014). For example, the 'Housing League Table' produced by homeless charity Shelter in 2010, found that only 13 per cent of new housing stock being built in Manchester was 'affordable' which was well below the council's target of 20 per cent, at a time in which there were 23 000 people on council and housing association waiting lists (Lockhart, 2011).

My approach builds on recent ethnographies of working class communities in Britain which have documented how the reduction in public services, including social housing, has left many people without access to vital resources and services, generating widespread feelings of betrayal (Degnen, 2005; Dench, Gavron and Young, 2006; Evans, 2012; Koch, 2015; Mcknenzie 2015; Smith, 2012; Tyler, 2004). In Salford, Wallace (2015) describes how state-led neighbourhood restructuring has not only displaced residents, but has carried them from ‘empowerment’ to ‘abandonment’. My observations in East Manchester echo these findings. De-industrialisation coupled with changes to housing policy and regeneration processes have resulted in the geographical displacement of some existing residents and for residents who remain, a deep sense of anxiety about the future is evident. In addition, my research demonstrates that for remaining residents, social relations have become reconfigured in highly specific ways due to changes in housing policies. This paper thus extends critiques of regeneration by showing how they become more complicated when the daily lives of people who are living in the midst of processes of urban transformation are explored. The three ethnographic vignettes presented below have been selected as they show how social relations have become reconfigured in varying and unexpected ways due to changes in housing policies.

Anne’s story

In February 2010, on my second day living in Beswick, East Manchester, a parcel was accidentally delivered to my house.² I took it around to the correct address, number 16, where Anne, was watching a soap opera on television and ‘minding’³ her grandson, who was playing contently, pushing toy cars along a fluffy red rug on the floor. Anne invited me to

² Some places names in this paper including the names of streets have been changed in order to preserve the anonymity and privacy of my informants.

³ Minding is a local idiom which means looking after a child.

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3 come in. I removed my shoes at the door, anxious not to dirty her spotless beige carpet which
4 covered the pristine living room floor. Anne and I had introduced ourselves on the street the
5 day before, as I carried boxes into my new house, where I had moved for the period of twelve
6 month's fieldwork. I told her that I had moved to Beswick in order to do research about local
7 life to which she quickly responded: 'I'll tell you, when you come over, I'll be getting the
8 soap box out!' The parcel delivered to my house offered the perfect opportunity to go and
9 introduce myself properly and to talk more. As soon as I sat down, Anne launched into a
10 well-rehearsed narrative about how she had come to live on the Avenue in Beswick. In a loud,
11 commanding voice, she said: 'If you want to hear about regeneration, I'll tell you about
12 regeneration. It's been a bloody mess from start to finish'.
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26 Anne had lived in the three bedroom semi-detached house for four years, since the new estate
27 was built. Now in her sixties, she moved to Manchester from Scotland in the early 1970s with
28 two young children in search of work. After living in a couple of council owned rented
29 properties she was allocated a newly built terraced house in Beswick in 1980. Eight years
30 after moving in, Anne bought the property from the council, as part of the Right to Buy
31 scheme, introduced by the Thatcher government as part of the 1980 *Housing Act* (for further
32 discussion on housing policy see Shapely, 2006). Council tenants were given the opportunity
33 to purchase the houses they rented from the local authority for a discounted rate, calculated
34 from the rent they had already paid as tenants. Anne told me that when she moved into the
35 house it was like something from an American magazine: 'It was beautiful. It had a kitchen
36 you could dance in, it was so big.' Anne described the 'third generation estate' with great
37 affection. Her daughter and granddaughter lived close by and everyone knew each other. If
38 there was any trouble, it was sorted out quickly between the neighbours. She said that you
39 could tell a troublemaker 'to pack it in' or else get their Mum to 'sort it'. Her words
40 suggested that there was 'no moral ambiguity' as everyone knew how to behave (see also,
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Blokland, 2001). As I have argued elsewhere (Author, 2016)⁴, nostalgic narratives about the past are an important means through which residents strengthen social relations in the present amid feelings of uncertainty and change.

In 2002, Anne and the other twelve homeowners on the estate were issued with Compulsory Purchase Orders, a notice served to homeowners by the council which allowed them to obtain properties without the consent of the owner. Compensation is usually paid at the price of the value of the property and these orders are issued in order to make space for new developments. Even though a number of the residents formed a committee to oppose the plans, the demolition went ahead. She told me:

There wasn't a stranger in the 181 houses. It was a terrible shock when they said the houses were going to be demolished. It was madness. We moved into them in 1978. From 181 houses that were on the estate, there are only a handful who have moved across [to the new properties], some didn't want to. Now they are all scattered around the area. There aren't enough houses over here. No one knew what was going on. Some just accepted their lot. They just sat by and let it happen. They are the types that are scared to make waves. All that has happened is that they have moved me across the road to a more affluent community. I think the council should be held accountable for what they have done. It's a type of social cleansing. Their first promise was that people would be no less well off, well that's a lie. What they have done is legal but it is certainly not moral.

As Anne's account reflects, when houses are demolished not only the 'bricks and mortar' disappear but also the feelings of security and permanence are ruined, as the flow of everyday life is ruptured (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995).

Anne bitterly missed the old estate, insisting that that there was 'zero community' where she had moved to. Even though most of the neighbours were able to 'get along', she said that

⁴ Reference blinded for review process.

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3 'new Beswick' was not nearly the same as 'old Beswick'. She pointed out of her back
4 window in the direction of where her house used to stand and instructed me to look at the
5 empty patch of land next time I passed by. Mounds of soil were banked up at the edges to
6 prevent vehicles from driving on it but among the shrubs, scattered rubbish and broken
7 bottles it was still possible to see some of the street signs from the old estate. Anne was
8 furious that the land remained untouched and said that it was insulting to those who had to
9 move away. I asked her why she thought that Beswick had been targeted for regeneration.
10 With sadness, she responded: 'To get rid of working class people. But all they have done is to
11 replace my community with a more affluent one'.
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24 Anne argued that in East Manchester, while individual tenants enjoyed the benefits of the
25 privatisation of housing stock, the sell-off of council housing has had a series of negative
26 impacts. In her view, those residents who owned homes were moved to good houses but they
27 ended up being disadvantaged because dense networks of informal support which used to
28 exist on the old estate were broken up. By allowing residents to have more 'choice', New
29 Labour assumed that tenants would feel more satisfied, and, in turn, look after their homes
30 and create more stable communities (Abbott, 2005). But, as my ethnographic findings reflect,
31 the notion of choice is rather complex. Anne benefited materially from being moved to a new
32 house that was valued at a higher price than her former home, but was not able to stay living
33 close to her former neighbours and, therefore, felt that her sense of community diminished.
34 Also, the government logic holds that that by giving social housing tenants the option to
35 select the location of their home, they would feel less like the symbolic 'other' to the private
36 sector residents (Abbott, 2005:31). But on the new estate in Beswick, divisions between
37 social housing tenants and homeowners were pronounced.
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55 As Anne's remarks indicated, the mixed estate where we both lived was seen to be divided
56 along the lines of housing tenure. In contrast to the political rhetoric, the privatisation of the
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housing market has exacerbated feelings of instability as existing social relations were disrupted. Rather than simply improving the conditions of social life, new houses have come to symbolise uncertainty to long-standing residents. What the council have done may be ‘legal but it is certainly not moral’, Anne argued, because regeneration has radically altered the lives of existing residents in East Manchester and ‘ruined’ community life. As Gosling (2008) writes, urban regeneration policies significantly impact upon the lives of women who rely on local support networks to manage their social exclusion. The geographical emphasis on urban regeneration tends to assume a presence of homogenous singular communities within specific locations. But, as Gosling (2008) argues, such a view fails to acknowledge that high levels of diversity and conflict exist within many locations. Even though some existing residents were re-housed in the same locality, for Anne the community was ‘ruined’ due to the disruption of social ties and the influx of new people and because former ways of life have been disrupted.

As a newcomer to the street, I explained to Anne that I would be living in Beswick for twelve months for my research and asked what to expect of life there. She told me that as long as I kept to ‘our’ end of the street I would be fine, as everyone was friendly and lots of families lived there, but she warned me that I should avoid going down to the far end of the road as there had been some trouble in recent weeks. Eight of the new houses were bought by local housing association and the tenants who had moved in were ‘bad news’.

Down the end of the Avenue the police are never away. They [the residents] are from where the Academy is [being built]. It was a bad area. There were good and bad, like anywhere. But there’s some wrong’uns put down there. Some of them have asked if they can join our Home Watch but we think they should set up their own.

Anne was angry about the changes which had been made to Beswick but she did not hold the council or the developers solely responsible. She also attributed blame to the other residents

for the lack of community in the new area. In her words: 'I've always said, it's not houses who make slums it's people'. Since the old estate had been demolished and the residents rehoused, Anne felt that there was no longer a sense of community in the locality. As she had suspected at the beginning of the regeneration process, the social life of the area had fragmented. For Anne, community had declined due to families and neighbours being separated from their kin based networks. Anxieties about the future of East Manchester were evident as residents questioned who the new homes and facilities were for. Rumours about the future of the regeneration plans prevailed in East Manchester but material objects, like houses, also sometimes played an important role in stabilising moments of transition. This is apparent in the following discussions with Grace, as she was committed to staying in her original home, despite most of the other houses on her street being unoccupied.

Grace's story

I met Grace, a woman in her seventies, at a coffee morning held in the local community centre. She invited me to visit her home in Openshaw where metal sheets were fastened across the doors and the windows of the red brick terraced houses to protect derelict properties being vandalised or squatted in. Grace moved to the house thirty years before with her husband after her seven children had grown up and moved away to different parts of Manchester to start their own families. After renting the house from the council she and her husband bought it under the Right to Buy scheme. When I visited Grace's home, I was struck by how warm and homely the house felt, compared to the uninviting feeling of the largely uninhabited road. Rows of figurines and piles of knitted toys decorated the sitting room and miniature daffodils peered in through the window from containers resting on the windowsills. Grace pointed to the photographs of her family which were hung on the wall and told me stories about bringing up her seven children and grandchildren. Showing me around her

house, she smiled and said proudly, ‘people always like my house, they say it’s like a cottage’.

Grace had lived alone since her husband died the year before. Like other residents in Openshaw, she was unsure about what was going to happen to her home and whether she would be able to live there in the future. While we sat in the lounge, she pointed to the carpet next to the sofa which had become thin and frayed under her feet. She had saved to buy a new one but did not know whether she would be wasting her money as the house might end up being demolished. With a sigh, she told me, ‘no one knows what is going to happen now’ and said, ‘we’re like a little lost community here’. Thinking back to the start of the regeneration project she recalled:

When they started all this work they sent us a big thick pad of information. They asked us if we wanted to have refurbishment, demolition or do nothing. They gave us estimates for each one. They said that we would have to move out of the area and pay rent so we all voted ‘do nothing’. Every other way would have meant that we weren’t a home owner anymore. We would have to take another loan out or pay rent. It’s a catch phrase [catch 22]. Lots sold up and moved into rented accommodation but they soon popped their clogs. People just give up when they moved and I thought, ‘you shouldn’t have done it’.

In recent years, Grace had started to think about moving to a bungalow. She struggled to walk up and down stairs due to arthritis in her knees but wanted to ‘stay put’ as the house contained many happy memories. When she first moved to the street, all of the houses were occupied and a large proportion of them were privately owned. Over the past fifteen years, there had been a great deal of change on the street. Since the closure of industries and subsequent depopulation, a large number of houses have become unoccupied.

In the 1990s Beswick and Openshaw were some of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country. Rapid deindustrialisation resulted in East Manchester having a ‘fragile’ economic base with

52% of residents receiving benefits and 12% unemployed (Parkinson et al., 2006:2). In turn, the housing market collapsed. There were 20% vacancy levels and negative equity (Parkinson et al., 2006:3). Some of the unoccupied properties were bought by private landlords, who, as Grace explained, would 'stick anyone' on the street resulting in a high turnover in the population and the houses falling into further states of disrepair. She told me that she had known lots of older people 'who had enough, moved out and died quickly', which made her feel anxious about moving away.

Even though there were only a few remaining people living on the street, Grace felt that it was important to still be a 'good neighbour' by making sure that the houses were secure and the communal areas, like the back alley, were kept tidy. She had five different sets of keys for other houses on the road and often checked in on her neighbours and also the unoccupied houses. For Grace, home not only referred to the house she lives in but also other spaces which surround it, like the back alley and the 'croft' at the end of the road, where she would regularly pick up litter.⁵ In the early morning, she often had difficulty sleeping so she would walk up and down the back alley to exercise her arthritic knees. On a couple of occasions, she noticed how the door to one of the houses had been left open.

I think someone's using it as a den. There's an ash tray with fresh butts in it and an ironing board with a plate on it and a stool. It's never been cleared out properly, there are still eggs in the kitchen and all of the things in there. We've knocked the handle off so no one can get in there. I phoned Northern Counties [the social landlords] and told them and they thanked me for doing it. It's not my job though. It's been five years. They should have sorted it before now. I gave the builder who is working on my kitchen some screws so he could go and board it all up. He told me, 'you're an old person, you shouldn't be having to do this'.

⁵ A croft is an idiom meaning a green space of communal land.

The caretaking role which Grace performed on her street was in one sense pragmatic. She kept an eye on the neighbouring houses in order to make sure that her own home was safe from intruders. But Grace’s sense of attachment to houses and the street holds further significance, relating to her sense of belonging to East Manchester which was maintained through looking after the physical environment. Living in a site of urban regeneration has reconfigured perceptions of belonging for remaining residents, which in turn has created new meanings about the individual, family and community which is also evident in the following example.

Linda and Danielle’s story

Since the 1990s, there has been a surge of interest in home decoration in British popular culture such as television programmes and weekly magazines offering advice on interior design in which people make visions they have of themselves, visible to the eyes of others (Clarke, 2001). Home interiors are a special interest of Linda who owned a 1970s semi-detached house in Beswick. She and her husband had lived in East Manchester all of their lives and planned to stay living in the area as their ‘roots’ and family were there. Linda detested the new houses which had been built opposite her home, saying they looked like sheds or rabbit hutches and were far too small for a family to live in because they did not have adequate space or storage. Linda had recently had an extension built on to her home to create two new bedrooms and a large living space beneath. She proudly gave me a tour around the house to show me the new laminate wood flooring and large black leather sofas. While we were looking at the new extension Linda shut the door to the other part of the house and said that she was too embarrassed to show me the old living room because it was scruffy and filled with all her children’s toys.

Creating a home is seen to be an important act of individual expression and a process in which past and future trajectories are negotiated through fantasy and action, projection and

interiorisation (Clarke, 2001). Linda's family were delighted by the modifications which they had made to their home. Her husband described the house as his 'ranch' and explained how the extra space meant that they will no longer be 'crammed together'. Linda told me that it would take a long time for her and her husband to pay off the loan they secured to build the extension, but it would be worth it when she had the family round at weekends and especially at Christmas time. Her remarks demonstrate how family and household are mutually constitutive of the house which itself is often regarded as 'the mediating element' (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 1999:1). In other words, the family and the house are neither congruent nor interchangeable, but are absolutely inseparable.

Linda's eldest daughter Danielle, a mother of three, lived a couple of streets away in Beswick with her family. After leaving home and meeting her husband Mike, they rented a new three-bedroom house from one of the housing associations, Eastlands Homes. When the couple first got together they lived in a one bedroom flat in Beswick before being offered a terraced house nearby. After five years the house was demolished to make room for the new Academy school. Danielle told me that they were given priority for one of the new houses being built nearby as they had proved that they were good tenants by always paying their rent on time and because they had family living close by. The couple were pleased with their new house and knew all of their neighbours who had moved from the old estate, as they had. Eastlands Homes had recently informed the couple that since they had been reliable tenants for a number of years, it would be possible for them to buy their house.

Mike told me that they were tempted but did not feel that it was the right time to take up the offer as he had recently started a new job and was concerned about taking out a mortgage because of the unstable economic climate. Also, Danielle added, if they were to buy a house, a semi-detached one would be preferable so they could have the option to build an extension in the future, as her parents had done. Mike added, 'if we won the lottery, I'd be out of here.'

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Surprised, Danielle protested, ‘ohh no!’ to which Mike responded by asking her what she would do if she were to win a huge sum of money. She looked out of the window across the road to a square of empty land opposite their house where the estate had previously been and said, ‘I’d build a big house over there’, insisting that no amount of money would change her feelings about living in Beswick. She said with sadness, ‘I’m the only one who loves Beswick, even though we’ve got nothing’. These findings resonate with McKenzie’s (2015) work in St Ann’s, Nottingham, which powerfully illustrates how the women she worked with were acutely aware of the negative stigma associated with their community from outsiders. Restricted by a lack of opportunities outside, they turned inwards, to the estate, family, friends and their wider community for support and articulated a strong sense of local belonging.

In East Manchester regeneration processes have attempted to revive the housing market with a range of new developments and incentives to bring investment into the area and create a better standard of living for all residents. By creating new housing it is hoped that economic growth will be stimulated and a more sustainable future would be ensured for all residents. However, my ethnographic examples show that choices involved in housing are not only related to economic factors but are also intimately connected to historical and emotional attachments, to places and to people. As the discussion with Linda and Danielle reflects, the household refers not only the nuclear family, who are living together under one roof, but extends further to family members living in the same locality. Danielle says that she would never leave her Beswick even if she won the lottery because the area is home. This example powerfully highlights how people long for suitable housing coupled with a sense of place in which they can imagine the future for themselves and their families.

Anthropological approaches to materiality and the home

These findings from East Manchester relate to Allen's (2008) work on housing in Liverpool which has also undergone repeated waves of urban regeneration. Allen argues that when working class people are faced with an economic world which has to be dealt with on a day to day basis ('getting by') they relate to houses in a practical or 'matter-of-fact' way. He concludes that they are unable to perceive houses as anything other than dwelling space, 'that is, a place to live' (2008:7). Reflecting on what he calls the 'violent nature' of housing policies, Allen describes how regeneration agencies claim that they 'help' working class people adjust to new markets by providing a minimal percentage of 'affordable' houses and loans. But Allen argues that these policies violate working class 'being' towards houses, as a place to 'dwell', rather than a financial investment. This argument resonates with my findings which reveal how schemes such as Right to Buy, which encourage homeownership, have left some residents in East Manchester in precarious situations. Grace's strong emotional attachment to her home and the attention she gave to the back alley and the derelict houses also points to a different kind of relationship between the material and social world, than is observable in Allen's (2008) work.

In order to understand the divergences in these findings, Miller's (2001) work on materiality offers a useful starting point. He argues that a house should be approached as social organisation which has agency. Miller suggests that the materiality of the house can tell us about the fine-grained relationships between people and the material cultures of the home, which offers powerful insights into the societies in question (2001:15). Further, the home provides a primary means of exploring the individual's appropriation of the larger world, offering a representation of that world, within the private domain. A house might refer to an entity or 'bricks and mortar', describes Edwards, (2000) but the notion of home requires relations both between households as much as within. This discussion explores how homes

are not static, they are ‘processual’ because they are built, maintained and modified to suit the needs of their occupants (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995).

Grace’s routine demonstrates that understandings of home are not just based on somewhere being familiar but are also related to feelings of responsibility that people take towards place. It is often assumed that abandoned houses create a sense of anxiety, and give rise to a kind of alarm, as a house without people is not a proper home (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995). But in the context of rapid urban change in East Manchester, derelict houses are commonplace and therefore remain central to rather than distinct from notions of home. For Grace, it was not only important for her to take care of her own house, but also the communal spaces and neighbouring houses on her street which reflect how material belonging relates to the home and street. The differences in my analysis, compared to Allen’s (2008) reveals how the impact of urban redevelopment will always be specific to each location and indicates how generalisations across ‘working class people’ should be avoided. Moreover, they show that the relationship between the physical environment and social relations are dynamic and changing, and essential to explore. In East Manchester, remaining residents like Anne, Grace and Linda talked about houses not only as a place to live but as a site on which they invest huge emotional and symbolic attachment. In both cases, the physical environment acts as a conduit through which social relations are shaped.

As Bennett (2015) describes, belonging as a way of ‘being-in-the-world’ becomes tangible through relationships with place, things and other people. While belonging may be ‘nebulous and ineffable’ it importantly, relates to identity (May, 2013) and should be understood as a practice, a way of being in the world which is tangible as an embodied, material, rhythmic performance of caring for the world (Bennett, 2015). Routines are not simply performed in homes, but are part of the ‘ongoing processes through which a home, its atmosphere and the living of everyday domestic life are constituted and experienced’ (Pink and Leder Mackley,

2014:178). Belonging, specifically in place, is tangible as an ‘embodied, material and rhythmic performance’ (Bennett, 2015:956). It is important to stress that material belonging differs between individuals. For Linda and her daughter, their sense of belonging is inextricably linked to their family relationships and their discussions around home are focused on their aspirations for their children’s future in Beswick. In contrast, Grace felt uncertain about the future and so the derelict houses and communal spaces such as the croft held great significance for her because of the memories of community which are evoked in these spaces.

These findings demonstrate how relationships to place are not simply given but are made over time, through what Ingold (1993) describes as a process of ‘dwelling in place’. Rather than seeing the world as a place filled with such things that humans perceive as external to themselves and then building relationships to those things, Ingold (1993) describes how the life worlds of persons and things are entangled from the start. The entanglement of people and houses is evident, in Anne’s account. Compared to the strong sense of attachment to the estate she had lived on before, Anne felt dissatisfied about the new house because she could no longer live close to her family and had been separated from her previous neighbours.

Following an anthropological approach to the home, with the relationship between materiality and social relations at the centre, we see that that house and the neighbourhood are not simply a backdrop for practice and agency but can tell us about the ways in which social relations are formed. This is evident in Grace’s story, where living on the street involved continuing to act as ‘a good neighbour’ because of her long attachment to the locality, which was enacted through the relationship to the physical environment.

As Harvey and Knox (2013) describe, objects are not only materially and socially constituted but are ‘the crystallisations of histories, projections into the future, powerful forbears of that which is to come and painful reminders of that which has been’ (2013:10). Objects, such as

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houses, are not just a way of describing the past through the relations by which they have been made, nor are they simply a means of constituting the present through the relations that they forge. Even though Grace was unsure about her future on the street, the houses held great significance including a ‘virtual potential, orientating people and things towards and undefined and yet pressing sense of the future’ (Harvey and Knox, 2013:12). Housing and other material objects play an important role in stabilising moments of transition as people living in East Manchester envisage the future of the locality. While some critical accounts of urban regeneration describe the displacement of local populations (Watt, 2013) and the disenfranchisement of those who remain living in sites of regeneration (Wallace, 2015) we see how the redevelopments of East Manchester have, in some cases, reinforced individuals’ sense of belonging for those residents who remain. Attachments to East Manchester are fostered through connections between residents and, importantly, the built environment. Housing raises the question about the possibility of continuing social relations into the future and therefore, comes to mediate these relations. Here it is useful to refer to Jansen’s (2007) work, which addresses the importance of ‘home’ among returnees to Bosnia Herzegovnia after the 1990s war, through an emphasis on personhood and transformative social relations. He shows that embodied attachment to place should not be assumed but needs to be analysed as a possible dimension in ‘home making’ which is conceptualised as a dynamic process in which relationships to places are produced. Jansen complicates the common assumption that refugees maintain a ‘myth of return’ and a ‘home orientation’ after displacement. Instead, showing that the notion of home varies according to previous connections and how the desire for a ‘normal life’ enticed some to return while others searched for ‘better places’ where the possibilities of leading a normal life were deemed to be more realistic. People’s imaginings and acts of return were linked to a

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3 ‘sense of possibility’ and the perceived potential of a location and the creation of a social
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5 base for recognition and hope (Jansen, 2007:27).
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8 The shifting dynamics of home in Bosnia and East Manchester, which both face specific
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10 conditions of radical change, demonstrate how the process of home making is always bound
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12 together with the ways in which people perceive the future. As Jansen writes: ‘Rather than
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14 reducing ‘home’ retrospectively to a remembered site of *belonging*, we should also analyse it
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16 prospectively as a socially constituted object of longing’ (2007:27). This analysis is helpful
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18 for understanding the ways in which people make home, in contexts of rapid upheaval,
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20 showing how they invest meaning in their houses and long for a better future. For example,
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22 Danielle considered the empty patch of land opposite her home as a potential site in which
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24 she might build her dream home. Against the protests of her husband, she declared that she
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26 wanted to stay living in Beswick so she could bring up her children close to her family, even
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28 if she had enough money to move away due to her strong sense of belonging to the area.
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33 Processes of regeneration, which include the modification or rebuilding of housing,
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35 physically reconfigure the basic units of a social group, which in turn create new meanings
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37 about the home. This research demonstrates how urban regeneration processes have impacted
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39 upon existing residents in different ways. By exploring the transforming meaning of houses
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41 and homes ethnographically, it is possible to explain why social change is understood to be
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43 inherently unpredictable. Moreover, it reflects on the reasons why individuals living in
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45 contexts of radical uncertainty continue to invest emotional and financial resources into their
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47 houses and neighbourhoods to make them into homes. It is from this perspective that it is
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49 possible to explore ways in which individuals make attachments to people and places and
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51 shed light on the lived experiences of urban regeneration. These observations add to the
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53 existing regeneration literature, showing how in order to understand the experiences of
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people who remain in localities undergoing redevelopment, it is necessary to examine the ways in which homes impinge on people’s lives in powerful ways.

Conclusion

Urban regeneration is both a type of redevelopment and a model of social change that has been deployed in UK cities since the mid-1990s and has been mobilised in a number of different sites within Manchester’s post-industrial reimagining. The premise of regeneration is that material change will bring about social change through redeveloping the built landscape. My research demonstrates, however, that for people living in East Manchester, the relationship between redevelopment and social change is rather more complex than the simple formula presented in the regeneration plans suggests. Despite the material transformations of the built environment, the present and the future are defined by uncertainty. Rather than progress, my informants experience the modification and building of new houses as unpredictable and unsettling. The redevelopment of the physical landscape therefore has had unintended consequences and has reconfigured social and material relations in unexpected ways.

I have drawn on three examples which reflect how, for some residents, existing houses are a symbol of stability, while for others new housing has become synonymous with uncertainty and questions about the future. The ethnography thus shows how houses make some things possible and others not. Using an ethnographic approach to urban regeneration, it is possible to explore how change is experienced by those people who are ‘being regenerated’ and examined the social relations which matter to residents themselves, which are often mediated by things or objects. Following on from the work of Doucet (2009) and Porter and Shaw (2009), these findings augment existing critiques of regeneration, drawing attention to the reproduction of inequalities in urban environments by focusing on the materiality of houses.

My findings strongly suggest that houses hold huge social significance to residents living in localities undergoing processes of regeneration, as belonging is shaped by domestic space as well as the wider locality, including the street or estate. In addition, for some people such as Anne, who has lived through numerous waves of urban regeneration and has been re-housed twice, the home can also be seen to restrict us. Relationships to houses are ‘processual’ meaning that they are constantly developing (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995). In conditions of radical redevelopment, repeated phases of redevelopment have been less about creating the conditions of social life to improve or even to continue. Rather, the demolition and rebuilding of new houses has disrupted social ties, in ways that people see to be inherently unpredictable. Consequently, there is considerable confusion surrounding the future of East Manchester, which is said to add to the growing sense of uncertainty and anxiety among residents. But, even so, a deep sense of attachment continues to be evident in relation to place. Urban regeneration policies tend to focus on the building of new houses in the creation of new communities. But these findings show that it takes more than building new houses to create homes. In fact, the notion of home stretches further than the walls of house and includes the surrounding locality, such as the street and neighbourhood. These findings reflect that future projects of regeneration must take seriously the ways in which material transformation, such as the building of new houses, affects the individual, the family and wider sense of community so that redevelopments can meet the expectations of existing residents. Further, urban scholars, should take theoretical approaches to materiality seriously, in order to examine the dynamic relationship between the physical environment and social relations.

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